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Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1453
INFO AMCONSUL CAPETOWN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GABORONE 0178

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, BC
SUBJ: DISCUSSIONS WITH MILITARY AND GOB LEADERS ON BOTSWANA
DEFENSE FORCE

1. SUMMARY: JAN 22-24 VISIT OF CECIL (PM/SAS) AND SOMMER (DOD/DSAA) TO GABORONE RESULTED IN TALKS WITH LEADING CIVILIAN AND MILITARY OFFICIALS WHICH PROVIDED VALUABLE INSIGHTS INTO CURRENT GOB THINKING ON DEVELOPMENT OF BOTSWANA DEFENSE FORCE. TOGETHER WITH COMMENT, THERE FOLLOWS REPORT OF OFFICIALS' REMARKS ON MANPOWER, TRAINING, EXPANSION, PURPOSE OF BDF, VEHICLES, SMALL ARMS, AIRCRAFT, NIGHT-VIEWING DEVICES AND THE UK ROLE. END SUMMARY.

2. JAN 23 DISCUSSION WITH BDF COMMANDING GENERALS MAJOR GENERAL MERAFHE AND BRIGADIER KHAMA AND JAN 24 DISCUSSION WITH CABINET SECRETARY STEENKAMP TOUCHED ON FOLLOWING AREAS:
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A. MANPOWER AND TRAINING: BDF IS CURRENTLY 1200 STRONG, ABOUT BATALLION SIZE, WITH AN INCREASE PLANNED TO SLIGHTLY OVER 2000 (SEE SUB-PARA B). POPULAR RESPONSE TO RECRUITING IS BRISK, ALLOWING GOB TO PICK AND CHOOSE RECRUITS WITH ENGLISH FLUENCY AND MINIMUM OF STANDARD 7 LEVEL OF EDUCATION. BASIC TRAINING LASTS THREE MONTHS AND THEN THE FIELD. OFFICERS,

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WHO ARE RECRUITED BOTH FROM RANKS AND AS CADETS, HAVE MINIMUM OF CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL CERTIFICATE AND EVEN INCLUDE THE OCCASIONAL UNIVERSITY GRADUATE. OFFICERS ARE TRAINED IN UK AND ZAMBIA. STEENKAMP COMMENTED THAT ARMY IS STILL BOTHERED SOMEWHAT BY CULTURAL PROBLEM THAT OLDER PERSONNEL NOT ACCUSTOMED TO TAKING ORDERS FROM THOSE YOUNGER.

B. EXPANSION AND EXPENDITURES: ALTHOUGH BDF GROWTH TO A 2000-MAN FORCE SEEMS TO BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED BY THE GENERALS, STEENKAMP MORE CAUTIOUSLY TERMED SUCH GROWTH AS AN "EXPANSION" STILL UNDER CONSIDERATION. STEENKAMP ADMITTED THAT HE IS MORE CONSERVATIVE ON MILITARY GROWTH THAN THE OFFICERS; NEVERTHELESS, HE CONSIDERS THAT THE PRESENT FORCE OF 1200 IS "TOO SMALL FOR ANY REAL VALUE" AND MUST BE DOUBLED. IF IT WERE DOUBLED, HOWEVER, BUDGET CUTBACKS MUST AT LAST BE MADE IN CIVILIAN AREAS. ALTHOUGH THE GOB HAD ALWAYS SAID IT WOULD CUT BACK, IT NEVER DID. NOW THERE IS NO BUDGETARY SLACK LEFT. STEENKAMP SAID THAT ANY IMMEDIATE EXPANSION WOULD ENTAIL DEVELOPMENT OF MILITARY FACILITIES FOR THE BDF AS WELL AS BUYING HARDWARE. HE ESTIMATED GOB MILITARY EXPENDITURES FOR THE FIRST YEAR SINCE THE BDF'S FOUNDING IN APRIL 1977 AS NINETEEN MILLION PULA; FOUR FOR RECURRENT EXPENSES AND FIFTEEN FOR CAPITAL COSTS - MOSTLY HOUSING FOR THE TROOPS.

C. PURPOSE OF FORCE: STEENKAMP EMPHASIZED THAT THE BDF WAS NEVER MEANT "TO TAKE ON" SOUTH AFRICA OR RHODESIA. BECAUSE OF CONFIDENTIAL

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THE COUNTRY'S MEAGRE POPULATION AND ECONOMIC BASE AND GIGANTIC DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS, THE BDF WOULD NEVER BE LARGE ENOUGH EVEN TO DEFEND ADEQUATELY BOTSWANA'S BORDERS IN EVERY CASE. HOWEVER, THE FORCE COULD EFFECTIVELY GUARD ECONOMIC CENTERS AND COPE WITH THE ANTICIPATED SPILL-OVER FROM A RHODESIAN CIVIL WAR BY PREVENTING VARIOUS ARMED BANDS OF "ENTHUSIASTS" FROM ROAMING OVER THE LAND.

D. VEHICLES: ALTHOUGH THE BDF PRESENTLY RELIES ON MILITARIZED LAND ROVERS FOR SCOUT CARS AND SEVEN-TON 4-BY-4 BEDFORD TRUCKS FOR TROOP CARRIERS, HEAVIER VEHICLES ARE NEEDED, I.E. ARMORED CARS. BRIGADIER KHAMA CONSIDERS THAT THE MAIN REASON FOR RHODESIA'S SUCCESSFUL INVASIONS OF MOZAMBIQUE IS THE LATTER'S COMPLETE LACK OF ARMORED CARS TO HEAD OFF THE OFFENSIVE. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE MENTIONED HIS DESIRE TO PURCHASE WHEELED VEHICLES SIMILAR TO THE COMMANDO SCOUT PRODUCED BY CADILLAC-GAGE. BECAUSE OF TERRAIN AND HIGH EXPENSE, BOTH KHAMA AND STEENKAMP TOLD US THAT TRACKED VEHICLES WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED. THE CENTRAL TRANSPORT ORGANIZATION (MINISTRY OF WORKS AND COMMUNICATIONS) IS CURRENTLY PULLING MAINTENANCE AND IS DOING SO UNSATISFACTORILY; THEREFORE, THE BDF PLANS TO DEVELOP ITS OWN CAPACITY WITH THE BUILDING OF MILITARY FACILITIES.

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E. SMALL ARMS: STEENKAMP SAID THE BDF FORCES ARE ARMED WITH A COMBINATION OF AK-47'S, BRITISH SLA'S AND BRAND NEW BRITISH STERLING M-16'S. THE M-16'S ARE COMPLETELY UNACCEPTABLE, HOWEVER, BECAUSE ADMIN SECRETARY TIBONE TOLD EMBOFF JAN 19 THAT BDF HAD JUST PURCHASED QUANTITY OF FN RIFLES FROM BELGIUM). ON QUESTION OF STANDARIZATION, STEENKAMP ADDED THAT BDF PREFERS NOT TO HAVE COMPLETE UNIFORMITY OF SMALL ARMS BECAUSE CHANGING ARMS POLICIES OF WESTERN COUNTRIES OFTEN MEANS THAT REPLACEMENTS, AMMUNITION AND SPARE PARTS MIGHT SUDDENLY BE UNOBTAINABLE. OF COURSE, BOTSWANA DOES NOT WANT TO RELAY HEAVILY ON AK-47'S FOR POLITICAL REASONS. GENERAL MERAFHE NOTED THAT ARMORERS WERE TRAINED IN UK AND NIGERIA.

F. NIGHT-VIEWING DEVICES: BRIGADIER KHAMA SAID THE BDF HAS NEED FOR NIGHT-VIEWING DEVICES. RHODESIAN TROOPS HAVE THEM AND, ESPECIALLY IN THE GUARD-POINT AREA, HAD OFTEN MOVED INTO NIGHT-TIME POSITIONS TO TAKE THE BDF BY SURPRISE. STEENKAMP, HOWEVER, DID NOT SEEM PARTICULARLY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT PURCHASE OF NIGHT-VIEWING DEVICES.
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G. AIRCRAFT: THE BDF PRESENTLY HAD THREE UK DEFENDER PATROL AIRCRAFT; TWO IN OPERATION AND ANOTHER ON THE WAY. TWO MORE WILL LIKELY BE ORDERED FOR A TOTAL OF FIVE. ONE CESSNA AIR TRAINER IS ON ORDER FROM THE U.S. THE BDF HAS EIGHT TRAINED BATSWANA PILOTS. ACCORDING TO STEENKAMP, NOTHING BEYOND THE DEFENDER PATROL PLANES CAN BE AFFORDED IN TERMS OF DEGREE OF COMBAT CAPABILITY. NOT EVEN THE MOST ENTHUSIASTIC OF THE OFFICERS ARE CONSIDERING FIGHTER PLANES, OR EVEN HELICOPTERS. MAINTENANCE FALLS TO LOCAL CIVILIAN AIR SERVICE COMPANIES. GENERAL MERAFHE REMARKED THAT MAINTENANCE HELP IS NEEDED FROM THE "FRIENDLY COUNTRIES".

H. BRITISH ROLE IN BDF: WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE UK ROLE HERE AND THE RECENT BRITISH MILITARY STUDY FOR A BOTSWANA DEFENSE FORCE, STEENKAMP SAID THAT THE BRITISH WERE NOT KEEN TO BECOME INVOLVED IN BOTSWANA AND, ONCE MORE, THEY WERE NOT TERRIBLY TRUSTED IN THE BDF. IN THIS LATTER CONNECTION, HE GAVE SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF UK EXPATRIATE ADVISORS IN BOTSWANA WHO HAD GONE OVER TO THE RHODESIAN SECURITY FORCES (ONE WAS EVEN IN THE BOTSWANA SPECIAL BRANCH). TOO, HE RECALLED THAT IN 1976 HE HAD WITHDRAWN ALL UK MILITARY ADVISORS FROM THE FRANCISTOWN AREA BECAUSE OF POPULAR DISTRUST. AS FOR THE BRITISH STUDY, STEENKAMP SAID MERELY HE HOPED THE BRITISH WOULD COME BACK TO BOTSWANA IN TWO YEARS "TO SEE HOW THINGS WERE COMING ALONG".

3. COMMENT: CECIL AND SOMMER REVIEWED BDF THINKING ON FUTURE PROCUREMENT OF EQUIPMENT AND NOTED TO THE GOB THAT MOST OF THE EQUIPMENT COULD BE OBTAINED THROUGH COMMERCIAL CHANNELS. THEY OBSERVED, HOWEVER, THAT APC'S, 105MM ARTILLERY AND NIGHT VISION EQUIPMENT MAY POST SPECIAL PROCUREMENT PROBLEMS AND CERTAIN TYPES OF AMMUNITION MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE COMMERCIALLY. CECIL AND SOMMER COMMENTED FAVORABLY ON THE CAUTIOUS, REALISTIC
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AND BALANCED APPROACH OF BOTH THE BDF AND GOB LEADERS TO MILITARY EXPANSION AND THE NEED TO CONSIDER SUCH PLANS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

4. ALTHOUGH EMBASSY NOT ALE TO SAY CONCLUSIVELY THAT TRAD-ITIONAL UK MILITARY ROLE IN BOTSWANA IS SERIOUSLY WEAKENING, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT SOME DETERIORATION HAS TAKEN PLACE, AS EVIDENCED BY A) STEENKAMP'S LACK OF EVIDENT ENTHUSIASM FOR THE BRITISH STUDY; B) GENERAL DISTRUST OF UK EXPATRIATES IN MILITARY AND OTHER SENSITIVE POSITIONS BECAUSE OF FEAR OF POSSIBLE LOYALTIES TO RHODESIA; C) STRONG BDF DISSATISFACTION WITH THE BRAND NEW BRITISH STERLING RIFLES; D) FACT THAT GOB AND BDF, AS EVIDENCED BY PURCHASE OF FN RIFLES AND INTEREST IN COMMERCIAL HARDWARD FROM US AND OTHER COUNTRIES, DO NOT FEEL

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COMPELLED TO "BUY BRITISH".

5. FINALLY, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT BOTSWANA PROCUREMENT WILL TAKE PLACE IN AN ORDERLY FASHION, CAREFULLY SPREAD OUT OVER A PERIOD OF TIME. ACCORDING TO STEENKAMP, BUDGETARY CUTBACK PROGRAM TO PERMIT EXPANSION OF BDF SEEMS TO BE STILL IN THE PLANNING STAGES.
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